

## **IV. FRANCE OVERVIEW**

### **OFFICIAL NAME:**

[French Republic](#)

### **A- Geography**

Area: 551,670 sq. km. (220,668 sq. mi.); largest west European country, about four-fifths the size of Texas.

Cities: *Capital*--Paris. *Other cities*--Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse, Strasbourg, Nice, Rennes, Lille, Bordeaux.

Terrain: Varied.

Climate: Temperate; similar to that of the eastern U.S.

### **People**

Nationality: *Adjective*--French.

Population (Jan. 2005 est.): 62.4 million.

Annual growth rate (2004 est): 2.3%.

Ethnic groups: Celtic and Latin with Teutonic, Slavic, North African, Sub-Saharan African, Indochinese, and Basque minorities.

Religion: Roman Catholic 90%.

Language: French.

Education: *Years compulsory*--10. *Literacy*--99%.

Health: *Infant mortality rate*--4.46/1,000.

Work force (2004): 24,720,000: *Services*--72.9%; *industry and commerce*--24.4%; *agriculture*--2.7%.

### **Government**

Type: Republic.

Constitution: September 28, 1958.

Branches: *Executive*--president (chief of state); prime minister (head of government). *Legislative*--bicameral Parliament (577-member National Assembly, 319-member Senate). *Judicial*--Court of Cassation (civil and criminal law), Council of State (administrative court), Constitutional Council (constitutional law).

Subdivisions: 22 administrative regions containing 96 departments (metropolitan France). Four overseas departments (Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, and Reunion); five overseas territories (New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna Islands, and French Southern and Antarctic Territories); and two special status territories (Mayotte and St. Pierre and Miquelon).

Political parties: Union for a Popular Majority (UMP -- a synthesis of center-right Gaullist/nationalist and free-market parties); Union for French Democracy (a fusion of centrist and pro-European parties); Socialist Party; Communist Party; National Front; Greens; various minor parties.

Suffrage: Universal at 18.

## **Economy**

GDP (2004 est.): \$2.018 trillion.

Avg. annual growth rate (2004 est.): 2.3%.

Per capita GDP (2004 est.): \$32,340.

Agriculture: *Products*--grains (wheat, barley, corn); wines and spirits; dairy products; sugarbeets; oilseeds; meat and poultry; fruits and vegetables.

Industry: *Types*--aircraft, electronics, transportation, textiles, clothing, food processing, chemicals, machinery, steel.

Trade (est.): *Exports* (2004)--\$341.3 billion: automobiles and automobile spare parts, aircraft, pharmaceuticals, electronic components, wine, electric components. *Imports* (2004)--\$349.3 billion: crude oil, automobiles and automobile spare parts, pharmaceuticals, natural gas, aircraft spare parts, electronics. *Major trading partners*--EU and U.S.

Exchange rate: U.S. \$1=euro 0.884 in 2003, and U.S. \$1=euro 0.804 in 2004.

## **B- PEOPLE**

Since prehistoric times, France has been a crossroads of trade, travel, and invasion. Three basic European ethnic stocks--Celtic, Latin, and Teutonic (Frankish)--have blended over the centuries to make up its present population. France's birth rate was among the highest in Europe from 1945 until the late 1960s. Since then, its birth rate has fallen but remains higher than that of most other west European countries.

Traditionally, France has had a high level of immigration. More than 1 million Muslims immigrated in the 1960s and early 1970s from North Africa, especially Algeria. About 90% of the population is Roman Catholic, 7% Muslim, less than 2% Protestant, and about 1% Jewish. In 2004, there were over 5 million Muslims, largely of North African descent, living in France.

Education is free, beginning at age 2, and mandatory between ages 6 and 16. The public education system is highly centralized. Private education is primarily Roman Catholic. Higher education in France began with the founding of the University of Paris in 1150. It now consists of 91 public universities and 175 professional schools, such as the post-graduate *Grandes Ecoles*. Private, college-level institutions focusing on business and management with curriculums structured on the American system of credits and semesters have been growing in recent years.

The French language derives from the vernacular Latin spoken by the Romans in Gaul, although it includes many Celtic and Germanic words. French has been an international language for centuries and is a common second language throughout the world. It is one of five official languages at the United Nations. In Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the West Indies, French has been a unifying factor, particularly in those countries

where it serves as the only common language among a variety of indigenous languages and dialects.

## C- **HISTORY**

France was one of the earliest countries to progress from feudalism to the nation-state. Its monarchs surrounded themselves with capable ministers, and French armies were among the most innovative, disciplined, and professional of their day.

During the reign of Louis XIV (1643-1715), France was the dominant power in Europe. But overly ambitious projects and military campaigns of Louis and his successors led to chronic financial problems in the 18th century. Deteriorating economic conditions and popular resentment against the complicated system of privileges granted the nobility and clerics were among the principal causes of the French Revolution (1789-94). Although the revolutionaries advocated republican and egalitarian principles of government, France reverted to forms of absolute rule or constitutional monarchy four times--the Empire of Napoleon, the Restoration of Louis XVIII, the reign of Louis-Philippe, and the Second Empire of Napoleon III. After the Franco-Prussian War (1870), the Third Republic was established and lasted until the military defeat of 1940.

World War I (1914-18) brought great losses of troops and materiel. In the 1920s, France established an elaborate system of border defenses (the Maginot Line) and alliances to offset resurgent German strength. France was defeated early in World War II, however, and was occupied in June 1940. The German victory left the French groping for a new policy and new leadership suited to the circumstances. On July 10, 1940, the Vichy government was established. Its senior leaders acquiesced in the plunder of French resources, as well as the sending of French forced labor to Germany; in doing so, they claimed they hoped to preserve at least some small amount of French sovereignty.

The German occupation proved quite costly, however, as a full one-half of France's public sector revenue was appropriated by Germany. After 4 years of occupation and strife, Allied forces liberated France in 1944. A bitter legacy carries over to the present day.

France emerged from World War II to face a series of new problems. After a short period of provisional government initially led by Gen. Charles de Gaulle, the Fourth Republic was set up by a new constitution and established as a parliamentary form of government controlled by a series of coalitions. The mixed nature of the coalitions and a consequent lack of agreement on measures for dealing with Indochina and Algeria caused successive cabinet crises and changes of government.

Finally, on May 13, 1958, the government structure collapsed as a result of the tremendous opposing pressures generated in the divisive Algerian issue. A threatened coup led the Parliament to call on General de Gaulle

to head the government and prevent civil war. He became prime minister in June 1958 (at the beginning of the Fifth Republic) and was elected president in December of that year.

Seven years later, in an occasion marking the first time in the 20th century that the people of France went to the polls to elect a president by direct ballot, de Gaulle won re-election with a 55% share of the vote, defeating François Mitterrand. In April 1969, President de Gaulle's government conducted a national referendum on the creation of 21 regions with limited political powers. The government's proposals were defeated, and de Gaulle subsequently resigned. Succeeding him as president of France have been Gaullist Georges Pompidou (1969-74), Independent Republican Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-81), Socialist François Mitterrand (1981-95), and neo-Gaullist Jacques Chirac (first elected in spring 1995 and reelected in 2002).

While France continues to revere its rich history and independence, French leaders are increasingly tying the future of France to the continued development of the European Union. During his tenure, President Mitterrand stressed the importance of European integration and advocated the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty on European economic and political union, which France's electorate narrowly approved in September 1992. President Jacques Chirac assumed office May 17, 1995, after a campaign focused on the need to combat France's stubbornly high unemployment rate and growing "incomes gap."

The center of domestic attention soon shifted, however, to the economic reform and belt-tightening measures required for France to meet the criteria for Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) laid out by the Maastricht Treaty. In late 1995, France experienced its worst labor unrest in at least a decade, as employees protested government cutbacks. On the foreign and security policy front, Chirac took a more assertive approach to protecting French peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia and helped promote the peace accords negotiated in Dayton and signed in Paris in December 1995. The French have been one of the strongest supporters of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU) policy in Kosovo and the Balkans. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the U.S., France has played a central role in the war on terrorism. French forces participate in Operation Enduring Freedom and in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for Afghanistan. France did not join the coalition that liberated Iraq in 2003. Notwithstanding the ensuing difficulties in U.S.-France relations, cooperation between the U.S. and France in the intelligence and law enforcement dimensions of the war on terror remained excellent.

#### **D- GOVERNMENT**

The constitution of the Fifth Republic was approved by public referendum on September 28, 1958. It greatly strengthened the authority of the executive in relation to Parliament. Under the constitution, presidents have been elected directly for a 7-year term since 1958. Beginning in 2002, the term of office is now 5 years. Presidential arbitration assures regular functioning of the public powers and the continuity of the state. The president names the prime minister, presides over the cabinet, commands the armed forces, and concludes treaties.

The president may submit questions to a national referendum and can dissolve the National Assembly. In certain emergency situations, the president may assume full powers. Besides the president, the other main component of France's executive branch is the cabinet. Led by a prime minister, who is the head of government, the cabinet is composed of a varying number of ministers, ministers-delegate, and secretaries of state. Parliament meets for one 9-month session each year. Under special circumstances the president can call an additional session.

Although parliamentary powers were diminished by the Constitution, the National Assembly can still cause a government to fall if an absolute majority of the total Assembly membership votes to censure. The Parliament is bicameral with a National Assembly and a Senate. The National Assembly is the principal legislative body. Its deputies are directly elected to 5-year terms, and all seats are voted on in each election. Senators are chosen by an electoral college and, under new rules passed in 2003 to shorten the term, serve for six years, with one-half of the Senate being renewed every three years. (As a transitional measure in 2004, 62 Senators were elected to 9-year terms, while 61 were elected to 6-year terms; subsequently, all terms will be six years.) The Senate's legislative powers are limited; the National Assembly has the last word in the event of a disagreement between the two houses. The government has a strong influence in shaping the agenda of Parliament. The government also can declare a bill to be a question of confidence, thereby linking its continued existence to the passage of the legislative text; unless a motion of censure is introduced and voted, the text is considered adopted without a vote.

The most distinctive feature of the French judicial system is that it is divided into the Constitutional Council and the Council of State. The Constitutional Council examines legislation and decides whether it conforms to the constitution. Unlike the U.S. Supreme Court, it considers only legislation that is referred to it by Parliament, the prime minister, or the president; moreover, it considers legislation before it is promulgated. The Council of State has a separate function from the Constitutional Council and provides recourse to individual citizens who have claims against the administration. The Ordinary Courts--including specialized bodies such as the police court, the criminal court, the correctional tribunal, the commercial court, and the industrial court--

settle disputes that arise between citizens, as well as disputes that arise between citizens and corporations. The Court of Appeals reviews cases judged by the Ordinary Courts.

Traditionally, decision-making in France has been highly centralized, with each of France's departments headed by a prefect appointed by the central government. In 1982, the national government passed legislation to decentralize authority by giving a wide range of administrative and fiscal powers to local elected officials. In March 1986, regional councils were directly elected for the first time, and the process of decentralization continues, albeit at a slow pace.

#### **Principal Government Officials**

President--Jacques Chirac

Prime Minister--Dominique de Villepin

Foreign Minister--Phillippe Douste-Blazy

Ambassador to the United States--Jean-David Levitte

Ambassador to the United Nations--Jean-Marc Rochereau de la Sablière

France maintains an [embassy](#) in the U.S. at 4101 Reservoir Rd. NW, Washington, DC 20007 (tel. 202-944-6000).

### **E- POLITICAL CONDITIONS**

President Jacques Chirac and his center-right coalition won the May 2002 elections. Chirac was first elected in 1995, and his party, the Rally for the Republic (RPR), won an absolute majority in the National Assembly. In Chirac's first term, a referendum was passed changing the presidential term of office from 7 to 5 years. During his first 2 years in office, President Chirac's Prime Minister was Alain Juppé, who also served as leader of Chirac's neo-Gaullist RPR Party. However, during the legislative elections of 1997, the left won a majority in the Assembly, and Juppé was replaced by Socialist Lionel Jospin. This right-left "cohabitation" arrangement, which ended with Jospin's resignation following his defeat in the first round of the May 2002 presidential elections, was the longest lasting government in the history of the Fifth Republic. Jean-Pierre Raffarin became Prime Minister in May 2002 following Jospin's resignation. In June 2005, former Interior Minister Dominique de Villepin replaced Raffarin as Prime Minister, shortly after the defeat of the EU Constitution in a referendum on May 29, 2005. Among other cabinet changes in June 2005, Phillippe Douste-Blazy became the new Foreign Minister and Nicolas Sarkozy was appointed Interior Minister.

As expected, in the second round of the presidential election on May 5th, 2002, Jacques Chirac comfortably defeated Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of the extremist, right-wing National Front. Chirac won by the largest margin (82% to 19%) ever recorded in the second round of a French

presidential election; at the same time, abstention reached a record level of 20%.

The ensuing legislative elections proved to be a victory for the center-right and a reversal of the 1997 elections. The center-right coalition party won 399 out of 577 seats in the National Assembly, thereby securing for Chirac and his party a majority in the government. Meanwhile, the combined left--Socialists (PS), Communists (PCF) and Greens--took only 178. The extreme-right National Front, despite the infamous second-place finish of its leader Le Pen in the April/May 2002 presidential election, won no seats. Abstention at 39% set a new record. In March 2004 regional elections, however, Chirac's party lost control of all but one region, while the Socialists scored major gains. The Union for Popular Movement (UMP)--center-right coalition party--won only 16.6% of the vote in the June 2004 European Parliament elections.

Experts have called on France to reduce government spending, the budget deficit, and public debt, and to allow flexibility in the implementation of the 35-hour work week. Mounting pressure for short- and long-term reforms include more labor-market flexibility, less taxation, and an improved business climate, including further privatization and liberalization. French and EU analysts stress that longer-term measures must focus on reducing the future burden of ballooning public pension and health care budgets, as well as reducing labor-related taxes. Government action to initiate such reforms may have contributed to the center-right's poor showing in the 2004 regional and European Parliamentary elections, and continues to spark periodic strikes and work stoppages throughout France.

## F- **ECONOMY**

With a GDP of \$2.02 trillion, France is the fifth-largest Western industrialized economy. It has substantial agricultural resources, a large industrial base, and a highly skilled work force. A dynamic services sector accounts for an increasingly large share of economic activity and is responsible for nearly all job creation in recent years. GDP growth was 0.2% in 2003, after two years of steady decline from 4.2% in 2000. GDP growth rebounded to 2.3% in 2004 from 1.1% in 2002 and 0.5% in 2003. Government economic policy aims to promote investment and domestic growth in a stable fiscal and monetary environment. Creating jobs and reducing the high unemployment rate through recovery-supportive policy has been a top priority. The Government of France successfully reduced an unemployment rate of 12% to 8.7% in the late 1990s but has seen unemployment increase to above 10.1% in early 2005. France joined 10 other European Union countries in adopting the euro as its currency in January 1999. Since then, monetary policy has been set by the European Central Bank in Frankfurt. On January 1, 2002, France, along

with the other countries of the euro zone, dropped its national currency in favor of euro bills and coins.

Despite significant reform and privatization over the past 15 years, the government continues to control a large share of economic activity: Government spending, at 54.7% of GDP in 2003, is among the highest in the G-7. Regulation of labor and product markets is pervasive. The government continues to own shares in corporations in a range of sectors, including banking, energy production and distribution, automobiles, transportation, and telecommunications.

Legislation passed in 1998 shortened the legal work week from 39 to 35 hours for most employees effective January 1, 2000. Recent assessments of the impact of work week reduction on growth and jobs have generally concluded that the goal of job creation was not met. The current administration is introducing increasing flexibility into the law, returning the country to a de facto (if not de jure) 39-hour work week in the private sector.

Membership in France's labor unions accounts for less than 10% of the private sector work force and is concentrated in the manufacturing, transportation, and heavy industry sectors. Most unions are affiliated with one of the competing national federations, the largest and most powerful of which are the communist-dominated General Labor Confederation (CGT), the Workers' Force (FO), and the French Democratic Confederation of Labor (CFDT).

France has been very successful in developing dynamic telecommunications, aerospace, and weapons sectors. With virtually no domestic oil production, France has relied heavily on the development of nuclear power, which now accounts for about 80% of the country's electricity production.

## **Trade**

France is the second-largest trading nation in western Europe (after Germany). France ran a \$23.0 billion deficit in 2004. Total trade for 2004 amounted to \$858.2 billion, over 40% of GDP. Trade with EU-15 countries accounts for 61.0% (2004) of French trade.

In 2003, U.S.-France trade in goods and services totaled \$84.5 billion. U.S. industrial chemicals, aircraft and engines, electronic components, telecommunications, computer software, computers and peripherals, analytical and scientific instrumentation, medical instruments and supplies, broadcasting equipment, and programming and franchising are particularly attractive to French importers. Total French trade of goods and services was \$994.4 billion in 2003.

Principal French exports to the United States are aircraft and engines, beverages, electrical equipment, chemicals, cosmetics, and luxury products. France is the ninth-largest trading partner of the United States.

## **Agriculture**

France is the European Union's leading agricultural producer, accounting for about one-third of all agricultural land within the EU. Northern France is characterized by large wheat farms. Dairy products, pork, poultry, and apple production are concentrated in the western region. Beef production is located in central France, while the production of fruits, vegetables, and wine ranges from central to southern France. France is a large producer of many agricultural products and is expanding its forestry and fishery industries. The implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Uruguay Round of the GATT Agreement resulted in reforms in the agricultural sector of the economy. Continued revision of the CAP and reforms agreed under the Doha round of World Trade Organization (WTO) will further change French agriculture.

France is the world's second-largest agricultural producer, after the United States. However, the destination of 70% of its exports is other EU member states. Wheat, beef, pork, poultry, and dairy products are the principal exports. The United States, although the second-largest exporter to France, faces stiff competition from domestic production, other EU member states, and third countries. U.S. agricultural exports to France, totaling \$425 million in 2003, consist primarily of soybeans and products, feeds and fodders, seafood, and consumer oriented products, especially snack foods and nuts. French agricultural exports to the United States are mainly cheese, processed products, and wine. They amount to about \$1.75 billion (2003) annually.

## **G- FOREIGN RELATIONS**

A charter member of the United Nations, France holds one of the permanent seats in the Security Council and is a member of most of its specialized and related agencies. France is also America's oldest ally; French military intervention was instrumental in helping Britain's American colonies establish independence. Because many battles in which the United States was involved during World War I and World War II took place in France, more American soldiers have been killed on French soil than on that of any other foreign country.

France is a leader in Western Europe because of its size, location, strong economy, membership in European organizations, strong military posture, and energetic diplomacy. France generally has worked to strengthen the global economic and political influence of the EU and its role in common European defense. It views Franco-German cooperation and the development of a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) with other EU members, as the foundation of efforts to enhance European security.

France supports Quartet (U.S.-EU-Russia-UN) efforts to implement the Middle East roadmap, which envisions establishment of a Palestinian state, living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel. Recognizing the need for a comprehensive peace agreement, France supports the involvement of all Arab parties and Israel in a multilateral peace process. France has been active in promoting a regional economic dialogue and has played an active role in providing assistance to the Palestinian Authority. It also allowed Palestinian Authority President Yasir Arafat to receive medical treatment in France during his final illness; he died there in November 2004. France has voiced strong support for Israeli Prime Minister Sharon's Gaza disengagement plan, continues to express concerns on the route of the Israel security barrier in the West Bank, and has called for an international conference before the end of 2005 to help relaunch the roadmap and move towards final status talks.

Since 2003, France has supported four UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions on Iraq, including UNSCR 1546, which laid out a timetable for Iraq's political transition and reaffirmed UNSC authorization for a Multinational Force in Iraq, at the invitation of the Iraqi government, to stabilize the country. France contributed in part to the 230 million euro EU contribution to Iraq reconstruction in 2003. After the Iraqi Interim Government took power, France agreed to substantial debt relief and offered police training to Iraqi security forces.

France plays a significant role in Africa, especially in its former colonies, through extensive aid programs, commercial activities, military agreements, and cultural impact. In those former colonies where the French presence remains important, France contributes to political, military, and social stability. France maintains permanent military bases in Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, and Senegal. France deployed additional military forces to Cote d'Ivoire in 2002 and to Central African Republic in 2003 to address crises in both countries and, with EU partners, led an international military operation to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2003. In 2004, it deployed military forces to provide humanitarian relief supplies to refugees from Darfur in Chad and to monitor the Chad-Sudan border. French forces are also serving with international operations in Burundi, Ethiopia/Eritrea, and Liberia. France has also deployed forces to Togo (in support of operations in Cote d'Ivoire), Cameroon, and the Central African Republic. An attack on French forces in Cote d'Ivoire in 2004 by government soldiers led to the departure of thousands of French nationals from that country, with some stating an intention to return to Cote d'Ivoire and others indicating that their departure was permanent.

France has extensive political and commercial relations with Asian countries, including China, Japan, and Southeast Asia as well as an increasing presence in regional fora. France is seeking to broaden its commercial presence in China and will pose a competitive challenge to U.S. business, particularly in aerospace, high-tech, and luxury markets.

In Southeast Asia, France was an architect of the 1991 Paris Accords, which ended the conflict in Cambodia.

### **Security Issues**

French military doctrine is based on the concepts of national independence, nuclear deterrence, and military sufficiency. France is a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and has worked actively with Allies to adapt NATO--internally and externally--to the post-Cold War environment. In December 1995, France announced that it would increase its participation in NATO's military wing, including the Military Committee (the French withdrew from NATO's military bodies in 1966 while remaining full participants in the alliance's political councils). France remains a firm supporter of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other efforts at cooperation.

Outside of NATO, France has actively and heavily participated in a variety of peacekeeping/coalition efforts in Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans, often taking the lead in these operations. France has undertaken a major restructuring to develop a professional military that will be smaller, more rapidly deployable and better tailored for operations outside of mainland France. Key elements of the restructuring include reducing personnel, bases, and headquarters and rationalizing equipment and the armament industry. French active-duty military at the beginning of 2004 numbered about 334,000 (including Gendarmes), of which nearly 35,000 were assigned outside of metropolitan France. France completed the move to all-professional armed forces when conscription ended on December 31, 2002.

France places a high priority on arms control and non-proliferation. After conducting a final series of six nuclear tests, the French signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996. France has implemented a moratorium on the production, export, and use of anti-personnel landmines and supports negotiations leading toward a universal ban. France is an active participant in the major supplier regimes designed to restrict transfer of technologies that could lead to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction: the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Australia Group (for chemical and biological weapons), the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the Missile Technology Control Regime. France participates actively in the Proliferation Security Initiative, and is engaged with the U.S., both bilaterally and at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), to curb nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) proliferation from the D.P.R.K., Iran, Libya, and elsewhere. France has signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention.

## H- **U.S.-FRENCH RELATIONS**

Relations between the United States and France are active and cordial. Mutual visits by high-level officials are conducted frequently. Bilateral contact at the cabinet level has traditionally been active. France and the United States share common values and have parallel policies on most political, economic, and security issues. Differences are discussed frankly and have not generally been allowed to impair the pattern of close cooperation that characterizes relations between the two countries.

France is one of NATO's top three troop contributors. The French support NATO modernization efforts and are leading contributors to the NATO Response Force (NRF). France is keen to build European defense capabilities, including through the development of EU battle-group sized force packages and joint European military production initiatives. Defense Minister Alliot-Marie has stated repeatedly that the development of a European defense must be done transparently and in complement with NATO, which remains at the core of transatlantic security.

France cooperates with the U.S. to monitor and disrupt terrorist groups and has processed numerous U.S. requests for information under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. French security and intelligence services have rounded up hundreds of extremists in the past year. The French judiciary has upheld the pre-trial detainment of the four French former Guantanamo detainees. France is a strong partner in multiple non-proliferation fora and is a key participant in the Proliferation Security Initiative. Through the "EU3" (France, the U.K., and Germany), France is working to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

France opposed the use of force in Iraq in March 2003 and did not join the U.S.-led coalition that liberated the country from the dictatorial rule of Saddam Hussein. Despite differences over Iraq, the U.S. and France continue to cooperate closely on many issues, most notably the global war on terrorism, efforts to stem the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and on regional problems, including in Africa, Lebanon, and Kosovo. On Iraq, the French agreed to generous debt relief for Iraq in Paris Club negotiations and have accepted the establishment of a NATO training mission there. Both President Chirac and former Foreign Minister Barnier have spoken publicly in support of the January 30, 2005 Iraq elections, even though they also expressed concerns about the need to broaden political participation in Iraq. Following President Bush's reelection, President Chirac and former Foreign Minister Barnier have called repeatedly for reinforced transatlantic and U.S.-French alliance. French forces participate in both Operation Enduring Freedom and ISAF and work with the U.S. training the Afghan army.

France seeks robust U.S. engagement in the peace process and assistance in ensuring that the post-Arafat transition proceeds peacefully and views U.S.-European cooperation on Israeli-Palestinian issues as a

critical component of a reinvigorated transatlantic dialogue. The Chirac government has attempted in recent months to improve relations with Israel. During a visit to Israel in October 2004, then-Foreign Minister Barnier praised the Gaza withdrawal plan as a "courageous first step," and urged a greater role for the EU in the implementing the roadmap. France and the U.S. co-sponsored last fall a UNSC resolution calling for Syrian non-interference in Lebanon and continue to cooperate on its implementation. France participates in the U.S. Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative.

The U.S. and France have worked closely to support a sovereign and independent Lebanon, free of Syrian domination. The U.S. and France co-sponsored in September 2004 UNSCR 1559, which called for full withdrawal of Syrian forces, a free and fair electoral process, and disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. In the wake of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005, the U.S. and France reiterated calls for a full, immediate withdrawal of all Syrian troops and security services from Lebanon.